

# Deschutes Provincial Advisory Committee

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## Meeting Minutes

**Date:** April 21, 2017

**Location:** Allen Room, Deschutes County Services Building, 1300 NW Wall, Bend, OR

### **Attendees:**

John Allen  
Marcos Romero  
Erik Fernandez  
Lisa Clark  
Jerry Hubbard  
Teresa Kubo  
Valerie Maxwell

Marilyn Miller  
Chris Johnson  
Brock McCormick  
Chuck Arnold  
Elvira Young  
Dave Stowe  
Lauren DuRocher

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### **Review of Wildlife Disturbance and Travel Routes**

The general idea is to pick a model area for the PAC to work through and make some recommendations with potential to be scalable to a larger geographic area. Brock McCormick (Bend/Ft. Rock District Wildlife Biologist) went over the presentation on the modeling the Forest has been working on regarding road and trail disturbance to wildlife and core habitat patches. A full summary of this presentation is within the PAC notes in March. Marcos Romero (Forest Transportation Manager) reviewed the Travel Management direction the Forest Service has been working through over the past 10 years.

Subpart B - Completed in 2008 – Motor Vehicle use map – Identified current roads system to show which roads are open to the public. It takes a NEPA decision to change this maps. Though there are known errors that the FS is working on correcting.

Subpart C – Over Snow Travel management – next phase will look at motorized over-snow vehicles. This has not started yet.

Subpart A – Minimum Roads Analysis/sustainable roads analysis – Not a NEPA document. It was an analysis document completed in 2015 that had districts looks at the risks and benefits of the roads. Resources such as recreation, fire, wildlife, botany, etc. Each resource ranked the road and came up with a final rating of the road. Criteria used for each road was generally described by the rule but details were set at the Forest level. These are outlined in the travel analysis appendix <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/deschutes/landmanagement/?cid=FSEPRD486162&width=full>. This rating translated to likely needed or likely not-needed for the future.

The Minimum roads analysis was a coarse look and is considered a starting point. At the NEPA project level, interdisciplinary teams take this assessment to make road change proposal. Once a NEPA decision is made then this will update the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

Overall there is a culture in the west, to be able to drive your car anywhere you want (i.e. Why are you closing my road?). This is a shift to think about how we use our motor vehicles on the forest. Closing roads is a very charged issue that can be very political.

The cost to close a road varies based on the landscape and type of closure. It is harder to close a road on flat ground as there are few pinch points to restrict vehicle traffic. There has been a culture

in some areas to tear out road closures, so it takes more time and money to effectively close roads. Some road closures are implemented through stewardship contracting and new methods are being tried out across the Forests.

### Pilot Project Areas

The PAC can look at the travel analysis, habitat patch modeling and other information to tease out a set of recommendations to the Ranger District. This can be a show case on how a collaborative group could come up with recommendations that would help move the Forest forward. Here are some future project planning area across the Forests that may have opportunities for this pilot area.

Green Ridge – Sisters RD, west of the owl line. Currently developing proposed action and has mixed conifer habitat with summer and winter deer range. Lots of great wildlife habitat potential.

Cabin Butte – Bend-Fort Rock RD, potential for hazardous fuel reduction, China Hat road bisects area, lots of problems with roads, thinning beyond the WUI area, some winter range, sage grouse habitat, cave resources.

Black Mountain – Ochoco NF, the project was just re-scoped last week, recreation pressure. Overlaps with recent OHV project area.

Sheridan-Ward – Bend-Fort Rock RD, next year possibly starting an update to the LSR assessment.

Twin – Bend-Fort Rock RD, around intensive recreation on the reservoir. Implementation is a challenge due to the recreation use. Heavy fuels treatment.

### Discussion

There was discussion about timing with the NEPA process and finding a project not too far out and not too far along the process. Overall, the group is considering how controversial a project area may be relative to road changes and where are some wildlife areas that we can enhance. It might be contradictory to where you get your most wildlife habitat benefit. The group overall had a sense of wanting to set up for a successful project that we can continue moving forward.

Brock talked about the potential for the Cabin Butte area. It has good potential for adding connectivity across the Forest and has some different types of wildlife habitat. Travel management can have a good implications for cave management and concerns about white-nose bat syndrome. Several in the group noted that the Bend urban growth boundary expansion could have implications for future use out there.

Green Ridge project area has some different forest types and seems less controversial with more wildlife values. This project could bring in another Ranger District to the PAC. In addition, there was interest in looking at an area on the Ochoco NF. Black Mountain may not be the best project to start with given the recreation interest in the area and overlap with OHV project.

There was also discussion about whether to pick one or more pilot project areas. By looking at multiple projects, it could tell more of story. Green Ridge, Cabin Butte, and project on Ochoco. Different landscapes and different users/recreationists. It will help bring a broad spectrum and help bring users into the mix for understanding. It about improving wildlife habitat not about restricting access. Building a new narrative around these issues. The focus on the positive, not the negative. There has been a lot of changes since the Forest Plan was developed and with population growth.

John Allen will check in Stacy Forson and Kevin Keown about projects on the Ochoco. There could be some coordination with Ochoco Collaborative. John will also check in with the Sisters Ranger District to see about interest in involvement with the PAC.

How to move forward at the next PAC meeting – it will be good to review more detailed maps, but also spending some time out on the ground. The PAC can help develop recommendations for the project with no preconceived notion of what the end project will be. FS will gather some of the base information: map of the proposed area, roads (by class) and trails, habitat core mapping, wildlife heat map.

## **Wilderness Planning**

Beth gave an overview of the Central Cascades Wilderness Strategies Project. Visitor use management and planning was last done in 1991 and was incorporated into the Forest Plans. There were a couple limited-use areas, the free use permit at trailheads, and other monitoring. There have been some changes to management since then but mostly small tweaks.

When looking at the permit data from the past number of years, the Three Sister's wilderness is separated out since it has much more use than other Wilderness areas. The data from the permits includes number of days staying, number of people, dogs, and stock. Also using data collected from the wilderness rangers such as how many people they encounter, campsite conditions, how much trash they pack out, how much human waste they need to bury. The data revealed some 'sleeping giants' which are areas like Tam Ridge that have spiked in use but were unexpected. Troy Hall and Oregon State researchers are also helping to weigh in on current research in wilderness management.

The goal is to come up with some strategies that will be consistent, understandable, and implementable. The team is looking at a suite of options to reduce use and impacts in these high use areas, provide opportunities for solitude, and preserve naturalness. The timeline includes having a proposed action out to the public by Memorial Day Weekend. Alternatives will be developed and analysis will go into the winter. Summer of 2019 is the target for implementation.

The PAC had an overall discussion about consideration of public outreach, audiences, and messaging. Considering tri-county population growth and visitor growth (more flights in/out airport and more hotels), is this increased use from visitors or population growth. Also need to consider dispersal of the overflow use and impacts to other trailheads.

The PAC could help with challenges such as what criteria could be used for when a day use permit system would be triggered. Also the PAC could help with weighing in on alternatives or help devise a communication strategy that is set up for success as this will be controversial and how to reach a wider audience. Public affairs is putting together a good outreach strategy including different marketing approaches and directing people to other destinations outside of wilderness – Bachelor, Tumalo, etc. PAC members brought up the importance of engaging other user groups beyond the backpacking community such as wilderness hunter groups. Some also raised concern about messaging around fees whether they are the recreation.gov fees or FS fees associated with permitting. FS fees would go toward the Wilderness program on the Forest.

Some requested getting some talking points from the FS to use in talking about this proposal. How can the PAC shape a message that is slightly different than FS message? Sustainable recreation committee will be working on this and then present to the whole PAC. Other future thoughts: ask Jason Fisher (lead wilderness ranger) to come to future meeting. At some point may need to present the John Day RAC.

## **Charter**

Current PAC Charter goes until Mid-May. Given some shifts in applications and some members leaving we will need to recruit some nominees from recreation and tourism sector. Also looking for Forest Products side. Perhaps talk with COTA, Mt Bachelor, and Sunriver resort.

## **Next Meeting**

We will try to hold the next meetings in early June, combining field and office time. Beth will initiate a doodle poll. Sustainable recreation committee- 5 pm, May 1<sup>st</sup> at the Phoenix restaurant.